

V. Background:

This game is the second of my biological games. While in my first game, Auweier, the players took on the role of male birds, I tried with this game to show in a simplified manner an occurrence that happens annually in our native forests. The deer rut in Germany begins at the end of September and can run into November. The Bucks compete by delivering hard blows with their antlers for possession of the numerous Hinds in a herd. Underdog Bucks don't usually face up to the Alpha Stag. They hardly dare to go near him. If they bother the Alpha Stag, he drives them away. However, these driven away animals soon appear as "Hangers-on" on the fringe of the herd, though always at a respectful distance from the Alpha Stag. As soon as he is no longer closely watching them, usually because he is measuring his strength against another rival, they all rush to engage in an earnest flirtation with any Hind standing at the fringes of the herd.

The Null Bucks have zero interest in fights.

Because of translation error, the phrase "**survival of the fittest**" has come to mean "the strongest survive" in German. It would better be said this way: those that survive are superior. This correct meaning doesn't necessarily have anything to do with strength, however. Like the mating combats of the red deer show, strength alone can be a cause for not surviving since deadly injuries can result. Further, every now and then, the antlers of two rivals become locked together such that they cannot separate. These two combatants soon perish since they can no longer eat or drink. Therefore, it is not always the strongest that are superior. Those that possess greater skill in leadership or craftiness can also be superior. This game demonstrates that the Null Bock, although he has zero interest in fighting, can yet defeat the strongest Buck.

Thanks: I would like to thank all the playtesters, whom I cannot list for reasons of space. Special thanks go to my wife, Antonia Rudolph, without whose support this game would probably never have come into existence.

VI. Imprint:

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Null Bock

by Henning Poehl (Sphinx Spielverlag 2002)

An exceptional trick-taking game with 60 cards for 3 to 6 players.

[Trans. note: The title of this game is a pun in German with no direct equivalent in English. In Germany, young people say "Null Bock" if they don't want do something, i.e. "I don't care about that!". Also, some older people refer to young people as the "Null Bock" generation. In the game, the "Null Bock" is the buck numbered zero, who doesn't want fight, he just goes his own way - CPC]

The game consists of two set of cards:

One set of 30 cards with Hinds and one set of 30 cards with Bucks.

The Hind cards consist of three cards each numbered from 1 to 9 and one card each numbered 11, 13 and 15. Each of the cards with the numbers 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9 also show a Plus sign (these Hind pretend to be more than they are).

The Buck cards consist of two cards each numbered 2 to 10. There are also three Bucks numbered 0.

What's it all about?

In this game, the players are part of the rut (mating season).

The Bucks fight for the Hinds, which are placed in the middle of the table.

Each player tries to place the Alpha Stag and, by doing so, to conquer a harem of Hinds.

At the end of the game, the player with the best harem (total sum of the numbers) wins.

Explanation of concept:

The middle of the table represents the Arena in this game. The Hinds gather here and the Bucks fight over them. The Buck that conquers the Hinds in the Arena is the Alpha Stag. Many cards may be played into the Arena during the course of the game. The area immediately in front of a player is called the Fringe. "Hangers-on" Bucks appear here and wait at a respectful distance

from the Alpha Stag for a chance to conquer a single Hind. Each player's Fringe may have a maximum of one card at the end of each turn.

I. Set-up:

The two sets of cards, Hinds and Bucks, are separated.

For a 3 player game, remove all Bucks numbered 2, 3, 4, 5 and Hinds numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4. They are not used.

For a 4 player game, remove all Bucks numbered 2 and 3 and Hinds numbered 1 and 2. They are not used.

All the cards are used in 5 and 6 player games.

Shuffle each set of cards thoroughly and deal an equal number to all the players so that they will each have 6 Hinds and 6 Bucks in their hand (in a 6 player game, they will have 5 of each type).

Each player chooses any one card (Hind or Buck) and places it face-down in front of himself (into his Fringe). Once all players have done this, they turn these cards face-up simultaneously and the start-player begins the game.

In the first round, the start-player is determined randomly. In later rounds, the player with the highest score is the start-player.

II. Course of the game:

The game is played in clockwise order.

On his turn, a player plays one card from his hand. Then the next player takes his turn.

Cards are played either into the Arena or the Fringe.

The start-player begins the game by playing a Hind into the Arena.

General:

- 9 The active player must always play a card. It doesn't matter if he plays into the Arena or a Fringe.
- 9 A Plus-Hind may never be played on another Plus-Hind.
- 9 In the Arena, a Hind may never be played on a Buck.
- 9 Whenever the Arena is empty, the active player must play a Hind into the Arena. If he is unable to play a Hind, the player to his left becomes the active player and must play a Hind, etc.

The active player has the following options.

A) Play a card into the Arena:

- 9 Play a Hind with a higher number onto the Hind most recently played into the Arena.
- 9 Play a Hind with a Plus onto another Hind without a Plus. The number on the Hind already in play is irrelevant.
- 9 Play a Buck onto the topmost Hind in the Arena (the number on the Buck can be lower than that on the Hind).
- 9 Play a Buck with a higher number onto the Buck most recently played into the Arena.
- 9 Play a 0 Buck (Null Bock) onto another Buck in the Arena. The number on the Buck already in play is irrelevant.

B) Play a card into any Fringe:

- 9 Play a Buck with a higher or equal number onto a Hind. The Buck then remains in that Fringe. The player who played the Buck has conquered that Hind. He places

the conquered card face-down in front of himself.

- 9 Play a 0 Buck (Null Bock) on any Hind. The number on the Hind is irrelevant. The Null Bock then remains in that Fringe. The player who played the Null Bock has conquered that Hind. He places the conquered card face-down in front of himself.
- 9 Play a Hind on any Buck. The number on the Buck is irrelevant. The Hind then remains in this Fringe. The player who played the Hind takes the Buck into his hand.
- 9 Hinds numbered 11, 13 and 15 may not be played into a Fringe. They may only be played into the Arena.

If a player cannot legally play a card, he misses his turn!

Winning a harem

When a player's turn comes around again and the last Buck he played into the Arena is still the topmost, because no other stag has dared in the meantime to enter the Arena, then he has played the Alpha Stag and he clears the Arena as a result. He takes all of the cards (Hinds and Bucks) lying in the Arena and places them face-down in front of himself as his trick.

This player, who cleared the Arena, then continues the game by playing a Hind into the Arena. If he can't do this, then the player on his left continues the game.

III. End of the round:

There are two ways that the round can end.

- 1.) the round ends when no players can play a Hind into the Arena.
- 2.) the round ends when the active player cannot play a card because he has no more cards in his hand. The player who played the last Buck into the Arena gets all the cards in the Arena. If there are no Bucks in the Arena, then no player gets the cards in the Arena.

IV. Scoring:

Once the round ends, each player counts the points on the Hinds that he has collected face-down in front of himself. Points on Bucks don't count. All points on Hinds that a player has in his hand at the end of the round, count as negative points.

If a player still has a Null Bock in his hand at the end of the round, he gets minus 15 points.

Note: If a player manages to clear the Arena with a Null Bock during the round, he scores 15 bonus points.

Cards remaining in any Fringe or in the Arena don't count for scoring.

Several rounds are played until a player reaches 150 points. Alternatively, a pre-determined number of rounds may be played with the high score at the completion of those rounds winning.